

The Nature
Conservancy



News Release

For Immediate Release: Jan. 5, 2018

Taunton Dam Removal Eliminates Mill River's Final Barrier to Migrating Fish

The West Britannia Dam removal is part of an initiative to improve river health and benefit local communities. A media availability at the dam site is scheduled for 10 a.m., Tuesday, Jan. 9.

TAUNTON, MA – Work is underway to remove the West Britannia Dam—a river restoration project that will complete a 12-year initiative benefiting people and nature by removing obsolete dams on the Mill River. The initiative is opening more than 30 river miles and 400 acres of lakes and ponds to migratory fish.

Demolition of the obsolete 85-foot dam, which was built the 1800s, is expected to begin next week.

The Mill River is a tributary of the Taunton River, which empties into Mount Hope and Narragansett bays and is the longest undammed coastal river in New England. With West Britannia Dam's removal, migratory fish, including native alewives and blueback herring, will be able to move between Narragansett Bay and the Mill River's headwaters for the first time in nearly 200 years. The removal of the dam, which is in poor condition, also benefits public safety.

- **Media availability is set for 10 a.m.-noon, Tuesday, Jan. 9 at the dam site at 144 West Britannia St., Taunton. For information, including parking details, please contact James Miller, james.miller@tnc.org or 857-600-6603. RSVP appreciated.**

“Removing an obsolete dam does more than release a river—it restores a route for migratory fish to reach their spawning grounds; it opens opportunities for people to enjoy the outdoors; and it allows communities to live without fear of flooding caused by dam failure,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Northeast Regional Director Wendi Weber. “The Service is proud to work with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts on this and other dam removal projects, improving the quality of life for Massachusetts residents. Our long-standing partnership with The Nature Conservancy has led to conservation successes like this throughout the Northeast.”

“Removal of West Britannia Dam will improve resilience to severe weather and climate change in Taunton, and allow river herring to return to a waterbody that has been blocked for over two hundred years,” said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Matthew Beaton. “The Baker-

Polito Administration is proud to work closely with our federal, nonprofit, and private partners on this important project to safeguard the citizens of Taunton and restore the health of the Mill River.”

West Britannia Dam was built as part of a mill complex previously owned by Reed & Barton, a silver-manufacturing company. It is now owned by Acuity Management, following Reed & Barton’s declaration of bankruptcy in 2014.

The dam’s removal is the work of several collaborating partners, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration, the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) Restoration Center, The Nature Conservancy, and Acuity Management, which owns the dam and has been a strong supporter of its removal.

Funding for the construction work is provided in part by the following:

- U. S. Department of the Interior Hurricane Sandy recovery and resilience funds, provided through the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act of 2013;
- The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs Natural Resource Damages Trust as administered by MassDEP; and
- The NOAA Restoration Center through a Coastal and Marine Habitat Restoration grant.

“This river restoration supports the largest coastal watershed in Massachusetts to not only improve local community resilience, but also restore passage by river herring and other sea-run fish to access valuable upstream habitats. These migratory fish are prey for popular recreational and commercial fish, such as striped bass and cod,” said John Bullard, regional administrator for NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Region. “We have actively participated on this project since 2005, and are grateful to our many partners whom have worked tirelessly in completing this project and the other three barrier removals in the Mill River.”

The West Britannia Dam will be the third dam removed, with a fourth being repaired and outfitted with a fish ladder, as part of a larger Mill River restoration project, which began in 2007 and has involved conservation organizations, state and federal fisheries and wildlife agencies, the City of Taunton, and local planners.

In 2012 and 2013, the nearby Hopewell Mills and Whittenton Mill Pond dams were removed. The Massachusetts Department of Transportation also constructed a fish ladder at the reconstructed Morey’s Bridge Dam forming the outlet of Lake Sabbatia.

For more information about the West Britannia Dam Removal, please contact:

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The near-failure of the Whittenton Mill Pond Dam during a severe rain event in 2005 led to the evacuation of downtown Taunton at a cost of about \$1.5 million. While the dam did not fail, and emergency measures were taken to stabilize the dam, the event helped catalyze the Mill River restoration partnership, as well as federal, state, and local support for the removal of unsafe and poorly maintained dams.

“The Whittenton Mill Pond Dam emergency on the Mill River in 2005 galvanized action across Massachusetts to take out dams at risk of failure; a dozen years later, dozens of obsolete dams have been removed, protecting communities and benefiting nature,” said Wayne Klockner, state director for The Nature Conservancy in Massachusetts. “For The Nature Conservancy, the West Britannia Dam removal represents the culmination of a remarkable collaboration to create a safer Taunton and a healthier and more vital river. I’m grateful for the vision and hard work of the many people who made this happen, and I can’t wait to visit this spring and see the first unobstructed fish run on the river in two centuries.”

From its inception, the Mill River restoration initiative has included the following partners: public and private dam owners, Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District, Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration, NOAA Restoration Center, The Nature Conservancy, The Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Save the Bay, American Rivers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, the City of Taunton, Massachusetts Department of Transportation, Mass Audubon, Taunton River Watershed Alliance, and the Massachusetts Environmental Trust.

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About the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

About NOAA Fisheries

NOAA Fisheries is responsible for the stewardship of the nation's ocean resources and their habitat. We provide vital services for the nation: productive and sustainable fisheries, safe sources of seafood, the recovery and conservation of protected resources, and healthy ecosystems—all backed by sound science and an ecosystem-based approach to management. <https://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/>

About The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy is a global conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world’s toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We are tackling climate change, conserving lands, waters and oceans at unprecedented scale, providing food and water sustainably and helping make cities more sustainable. Working in 72 countries, we use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. To learn more, visit www.nature.org or follow @nature_press on Twitter.